

HOM 5th Sunday Easter 2024 B April 28

I'm sure that you are tired of hearing me tell you that IT'S ALL ABOUT ONENESS WITH JESUS CHRIST. But it is. For example, all of the sacraments are about oneness with Jesus. And today's Scripture readings again make that point.

The Gospel reading, especially, helps us to see this where Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to describe our relationship with Him. Now the branches on a vine are distinct from the trunk of the vine. The branches have leaves and can produce fruit – grapes. BUT the branches cease to live if separated from the vine. They wither and die.

The vine, too, is incomplete without its branches. The vine trunk and branches are each distinct but they live together as one. They must be united to form one vine, and for each to be complete.

I refer to this as nuptial oneness because it's like husband and wife. The Scriptures tell us that the two become one body, and yet they remain distinct persons. They are to be one in mind and heart and body – perfectly united – and yet they remain who they are individually – distinct and yet complete together.

It's like the Most Holy Trinity -- three distinct divine persons – yet complete only in oneness with each other to become the one God. This, too, is nuptial oneness.

The same can be said of Jesus and the oneness of His two natures. He is a divine person with a divine nature AND He also has a human nature. His Divine nature and His human nature are perfectly one and yet remain perfectly distinct in Him. Together, they make Him Who He is. United to Jesus' Divine nature, His human nature is divinized. His two natures are inseparable but distinct in Him. They have nuptial oneness.

This nuptial oneness applies also to us and God. We were made for oneness with God by way of oneness with Jesus Christ. The spiritual oneness that we have with Jesus and the Father by the grace of the Holy Spirit given to us in Baptism is made complete in our Bodily oneness with Jesus in Holy Communion.

Our Bodily oneness with Jesus is by way of His human nature – His flesh and blood that is sinless and sanctified so that we can overcome and atone for our sins in the flesh. Our oneness with Jesus in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood is how we are sanctified in our human bodies. In our bodies we are united to Jesus' in His human nature – in His Body which is united to His divinity, and is divinized so that we can be divinized in our bodies.

Listen to what St. Hilary, a 4th century doctor of the Church, writes about this:

We believe that the Word became flesh and that we receive His flesh in the Lord's Supper. How then can we fail to believe that he really dwells with us? When He became man, He actually clothed Himself in our flesh, uniting it to himself forever. In the sacrament of this Body, he actually gives us his own flesh, which He has united to His divinity. This is why we are all one, because the Father is in Christ, and Christ is in us. He is in us through His Flesh and we are in Him. With Him we form a unity which is in God.

The importance of the Eucharist -- Holy Communion – in all this is bluntly put this way by Hilary: "*Christ will take to Himself (in heaven) only those who have received His flesh.*" Jesus Himself said this in His Bread of Life Discourse in John's Gospel (6:53-56) with these words:

Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day...Who ever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remain in me and I in Him.

In addition to participating in Holy Communion with Jesus in the Eucharist, we also have to keep God's commandments, as we just heard in our second reading today where John writes: "*Those who keep his commandments remain in Him and He in them.*" Like a vine and its branches, I would add.

But that's not all. Our oneness with Jesus requires us to do what He did when He offered Himself to the Father unto the Cross of obedience and love for the life of the world. This is what fulfills the Lord's new commandment to love one another as He has loved us. It is what perfects our oneness with Jesus and makes it fruitful. In the end, it is what brings others into saving oneness with Jesus. This is how the Vine, the Church, the Kingdom of God, grows as our first reading recounted. It was being built up and grew in numbers as St. Paul and St. Barnabas went about telling people about Jesus.

In his Letter to the Ephesians (1: 10), St. Paul writes that this is God's Plan for man's salvation – His happiness – to bring all into oneness with Jesus Christ – like a Vine with its branches -- so that, after sharing in His self-oblation to the Father unto the Cross and Resurrection for the salvation of all the willing – we will also be one with Him in His eternal self-offering to the Father in praise and thanksgiving and loving obedience in Heaven.

Our Eucharistic Self-Offering prayer with every Holy Communion is how we pledge ourselves to this, striving to live it out in-between. These are the words to pray silently and sincerely, knowing that Mary and Joseph, will bring about the fulfillment of our pledge, and by this, will also draw others – first of all, family and friends and all the willing -- into oneness with Jesus in His self-offering to the Father: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY, YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.